

not been in the majority for well over a generation, that there seemed to be a lack of a vision for the future, and that there was an acceptance of mediocrity and failure and second-class status for America.

Our belief was, at that time, that we could come together with a number of other Members and try and at least give voice to a new idea, a new vision, a more positive vision for America. We worked together with other Members and formed what was called the Conservative Opportunity Society because we thought that that was a positive vision for the future of America, consistent with Republican principles and, more importantly, consistent with and expressive of American principles. We thought it was an antidote to what we saw leading us at that time as the liberal welfare state. I think history has shown that, with the election of Ronald Reagan and the embracing of the Conservative Opportunity Society vision of America, that America could turn around.

We are confronted with what I believe to be a failed Presidency at the present time. We are confronted with questions and some great despair in families around America for the failure of an opportunity for jobs. And I would suggest that, at this point in time, it is appropriate for those who have visions, those who are ready to challenge the conventional wisdom, those who believe that America's best days are ahead, not behind, to come to the fore.

There are those who look at the faults of Newt Gingrich. I'd like to suggest that he was the one person that I know that had a vision in this House of how this House could be changed, how we, working as an institution, could work with a President to make changes and, ultimately, how this side of the aisle could, for the first time in a generation, actually be the majority.

Following his ascendancy to Speaker of the House, we actually had balanced budgets. We actually had some bringing down of some of the size of the Federal Government. We actually had some progress around the country. So I would say, for those who look at the faults of others, let's look at their accomplishments.

This is a time when it seems to me we ought to be serious about the future of America. We ought to be bold about the future of America. We ought to have some confidence in the greatness of America, the greatness of its people, not necessarily the greatness of its government. We need to have a good governmental structure that allows the greatness of the American people.

There are some on the Presidential debate scene today who are willing to challenge us with bold ideas. That has been done in the past and has proven successful. It seems to me we should not shrink from the future; we should embrace the future. We should, in fact, be leaders of the future.

I am not one elected to this House to be satisfied that the future of America

for my children and my grandchildren is any less than what it was for me as a child growing up. I will not stand here and allow us to act in vain so that the sacrifices of my parents, some call the Greatest Generation, I say one of the greatest generations, will have been in vain. They worked hard. They accepted the challenges of the future with an innate confidence in the goodness of the American people, the capabilities of the American people, and, yes, the common sense of the American people.

My hope is that as we go forward in this year, those of us who seek office for both the House, the Senate, and Presidency will accept that mantle of leadership that has been cast upon us from those in the past.

#### PENALIZING UNEMPLOYED AMERICANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my concern that Republicans are attempting to penalize unemployed American citizens who do not have a high school diploma. Last month, House Republicans included a provision in the payroll tax cut bill, which is presently in conference, to establish an educational requirement for recipients of benefits.

The provision, Mr. Speaker, would require recipients of unemployment benefits to have at least a high school diploma or a GED or be enrolled in classes to obtain such a degree. This requirement, Mr. Speaker, would affect an estimated 248,000 workers in the first 3 months of enactment, and disproportionately affect older workers, forcing certain unemployment recipients to either enroll in adult education programs or forego the benefits they need to support their families. This is a disgrace.

In 2010, half a million workers age 50 or over who received unemployment insurance lacked a high school diploma. For most of these individuals who have worked more than 30 long years, returning to high school makes very little sense. They are the bricklayers and the carpenters and sanitation workers and housekeepers in our communities.

In the case of workers under the age of 50, adult education might be useful, but is largely unattainable. Currently, State and local adult education programs do not have the capacity—we know that—do not have the capacity to meet this demand. Waiting lists for these programs are proliferating and certain to worsen due to a 20 percent decline over the past decade in Federal funding for adult education programs and \$1 billion in cuts to job-training programs in fiscal year 2011.

Creating an educational mandate as a condition of eligibility to receive unemployment insurance benefits, Mr. Speaker, is punitive. It's misguided.

It's egregious, even by current Republican standards.

While there are certainly benefits to receiving at least a high school education, establishing a blanket policy that denies unemployment benefits to low-skill workers who have lost their jobs due to no fault of their own, without ensuring they have unrestricted access to educational opportunities, sets up hundreds of thousands of Americans to fail.

It seems incredibly cynical to require participation in adult education and job training as a condition of receiving unemployment benefits while simultaneously eliminating meaningful Federal support for these programs.

Mr. Speaker, it is unconscionable to put additional strings on this crucial relief that do nothing, nothing to address the real causes of the current unemployment crisis. It is a difficult time to be unemployed in America. It is a difficult time to be unemployed in America, but House Republicans seem determined to make it even more difficult.

I urge my colleagues to join me and stand up against this education mandate and fight for policies that can actually help bring the unemployment crisis to resolve.

#### RECOGNITION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. FITZPATRICK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, starting January 29 of this year, Catholic schools across the country will initiate their annual observance of Catholic Schools Week. The theme for this year is "Catholic Schools: Faith. Academics. Service."

The 2012 theme emphasizes the principles of Catholic school education, which families in my district and across the country highly value. The theme focuses on three priorities that are distinct to Catholic schools. Children are taught faith, not just the basics of Christianity, but how to have a relationship with their God; academics, in which Catholic schools are held to very high standards.

Earlier this year I was proud to recognize the Nativity of our Lord Catholic School in Warminster, Pennsylvania, for receiving the 2011 National Blue Ribbon of Excellence Award.

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Finally, the third principle in the 2012 theme is service, the giving of one's time and effort to help others. It is taught both as an expression of faith but also of good citizenship.

Schools typically celebrate Catholic Schools Week with mass, open houses, and activities for students, families, parishioners, and the community at large. In addition to this year's list of activities, some schools in my district will host events welcoming families